



## Focus

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# Finding water to restore streams

## Introducing Washington Water Acquisition Program

### River basins targeted for water- right acquisitions (see map pg 2)

Nooksack  
Elwha/Dungeness  
Quilcene/Snow  
Snohomish  
Cedar/Sammamish  
Duwamish/Green  
Chambers/Clover  
Puyallup/White  
Methow  
Okanogan  
Wenatchee  
Upper Yakima  
Naches  
Lower Yakima  
Middle Snake  
Walla Walla

### For more Information Visit our webpage:

[www.ecy.wa.gov/  
programs/wr/  
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### Increasing stream flows in critical river basins

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The state departments of Ecology, Fish and Wildlife and Washington Conservation Commission have launched the **Washington Water Acquisition Program**, a voluntary program designed to increase stream flows in 16 watersheds (*see list*) with vulnerable fish populations. The program has strong support from a variety of local, state, federal and tribal governments as well as private organizations.

### How the program works

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The water acquisition program gives farmers, ranchers and other water right holders an opportunity to join in state fish recovery efforts by selling, leasing or donating their water rights to streams where critically low flows limit fish survival. Water rights obtained through the program will assure that the amount of water specified will be left in the original stream to enhance flows. The state has developed criteria and guidance to make sure all participants receive fair market value. Acquisitions will be targeted in areas that will most help fish.

### Ways to participate

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To participate, you can:

#### **Sell all or part of your water right:**

- Water will be held permanently in trust by the state.

#### **Lease all or part of your water right:**

- Long-term leases have a higher priority.
- Water placed in the program is not subject to relinquishment.

#### **Donate all or part of your water right on a permanent or temporary basis:**

- Permanent donations have a higher priority.
- When the donation period ends, you'll receive the same amount back that was contributed.
- Water placed in the program is not subject to relinquishment.
- Donations may qualify as a charitable tax deduction.

Those already involved in the state **Water Irrigation Efficiencies Program** can voluntarily place all or part of their saved water into state trust to enhance stream flows. The dollar value of the water set aside to improve flows must at least be equal to the amount of public grant money invested in the conservation measure or irrigation efficiency.

## In some watersheds, fish populations in peril

Over the last 10 years, salmon and fish numbers have dropped dramatically. The decline in populations has been severe enough that many fish are now listed as endangered or threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act. Fish need plenty of cool, clean water and accessible habitat to survive and thrive. In many watersheds, water withdrawals have significantly lowered stream flows or altered the seasonal distribution of water. In summer and fall when fish need water for migration and spawning, sufficient stream flows may not be there. Low flows also raise water temperatures and concentrate pollutants that can sicken or kill fish.

## Important interventions to provide sufficient stream flows for fish

One tool available under existing state water law is to set “instream” flows. However, flow levels adopted by rule are junior to previously existing water rights. Simply setting new or amending existing stream flow rules in basins with chronic low-flow conditions will not necessarily increase water available to fish. The water right acquisition program is an important tool to support fish survival. Water right acquisitions are particularly well-suited to small streams and tributaries where saving even small amounts of water can be particularly beneficial for fish.

